



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

TOLSTOÏ AND "THE KREUTZER SONATA."

BY ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

COUNT TOLSTOÏ is a man of genius. He is acquainted with Russian life from the highest to the lowest—that is to say, from the worst to the best. He knows the vices of the rich and the virtues of the poor. He is a Christian, a real believer in the Old and New Testaments, an honest follower of the Peasant of Palestine. He denounces luxury and ease, art and music ; he regards a flower with suspicion, believing that beneath every blossom lies a coiled serpent. He agrees with Lazarus and denounces Dives and the tax-gatherers. He is opposed, not only to doctors of divinity, but of medicine.

From the Mount of Olives he surveys the world.

He is not a Christian like the Pope in the Vatican, or a cardinal in a palace, or a bishop with revenues and retainers, or a millionaire who hires preachers to point out the wickedness of the poor, or the director of a museum who closes the doors on Sunday. He is a Christian something like Christ.

To him this life is but a breathing-spell between the verdict and the execution ; the sciences are simply sowers of the seeds of pride, of arrogance and vice. Shocked by the cruelties and unspeakable horrors of war, he became a non-resistant and averred that he would not defend his own body or that of his daughter from insult and outrage. In this he followed the command of his Master : " Resist not evil." He passed, not simply from war to peace, but from one extreme to the other, and advocated a doctrine that would leave the basest of mankind the rulers of the world. This was and is the error of a great and tender soul.

He did not accept all the teachings of Christ at once. His progress has been, judging from his writings, somewhat gradual ; but by accepting one proposition he prepared himself for the ac-

ceptance of another. He is not only a Christian, but has the courage of his convictions, and goes without hesitation to the logical conclusion. He has another exceedingly rare quality : he acts in accordance with his belief. His creed is translated into deed. He opposes the doctors of divinity, because they darken and deform the teachings of the Master. He denounces the doctors of medicine, because he depends on Providence and the promises of Jesus Christ. To him that which is called progress is, in fact, a profanation, and property is a something that the organized few have stolen from the unorganized many. He believes in universal labor, which is good, each working for himself. He also believes that each should have only the necessities of life,—which is bad. According to his idea, the world ought to be filled with peasants. There should be only arts enough to plough and sow and gather the harvest, to build huts, to weave coarse cloth, to fashion clumsy and useful garments, and to cook the simplest food. Men and women should not adorn their bodies. They should not make themselves desirable or beautiful.

But even under such circumstances they might, like the Quakers, be proud of humility and become arrogantly meek.

Tolstoi would change the entire order of human development. As a matter of fact, the savage who adorns himself or herself with strings of shells, or with feathers, has taken the first step towards civilization. The tattooed is somewhat in advance of the unfrescoed. At the bottom of all this is the love of approbation, of the admiration of their fellows, and this feeling, this love, cannot be torn from the human heart. In spite of ourselves we are attracted by what to us is beautiful, because beauty is associated with pleasure, with enjoyment. The love of the well-formed, of the beautiful, is prophetic of the perfection of the human race. It is impossible to admire the deformed. They may be loved for their goodness or genius, but never because of their deformity. There is within us the love of proportion. There is a physical basis for the appreciation of harmony, which is also a kind of proportion.

The love of the beautiful is shared with man by most animals. The wings of the moth are painted by love, by desire. This is the foundation of the bird's song. This love of approbation, this desire to please, to be admired, to be loved, is in some way the cause of all heroic, self-denying, and sublime actions.

Count Tolstoï, following parts of the New Testament, regards love as essentially impure. He seems really to think that there is a love superior to human love ; that the love of man for woman, of woman for man, is, after all, a kind of glittering degradation ; that it is better to love God than woman ; better to love the invisible phantoms of the skies than the children upon our knees—in other words, that it is far better to love a heaven somewhere else than to make one here. He seems to think that women adorn themselves simply for the purpose of getting in their power the innocent and unsuspecting men. He forgets that the best and purest of human beings are controlled, for the most part unconsciously, by the hidden, subtle tendencies of nature. He seems to forget the great fact of "natural selection," and that the choice of one in preference to all others is the result of forces beyond the control of the individual. To him there seems to be no purity in love, because men are influenced by forms, by the beauty of women ; and women, knowing this fact, according to him, act, and consequently both are equally guilty. He endeavors to show that love is a delusion ; that at best it can last but for a few days ; that it must of necessity be succeeded by indifference, then by disgust, lastly by hatred ; that in every Garden of Eden is a serpent of jealousy, and that the brightest days end with the yawn of ennui.

Of course he is driven to the conclusion that life in this world is without value, that the race can be perpetuated only by vice, and that the practice of the highest virtue would leave the world without the form of man. Strange as it may sound to some, this is the same conclusion reached by his Divine Master : "They did eat, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered the ark and the flood came and destroyed them all." "Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."

According to Christianity, as it really is and really was, the Christian should have no home in this world—at least none until the earth has been purified by fire. His affections should be given to God ; not to wife and children, not to friends or country. He is here but for a time on a journey, waiting for the summons. This life is a kind of dock running out into the sea of eternity, on which he waits for transportation. Nothing here is of any

importance ; the joys of life are frivolous and corrupting, and by losing these few gleams of happiness in this world he will bask forever in the unclouded rays of infinite joy. Why should a man risk an eternity of perfect happiness for the sake of enjoying himself a few days with his wife and children ? Why should he become an eternal outcast for the sake of having a home and fireside here ?

The "Fathers" of the church had the same opinion of marriage. They agreed with Saint Paul, and Tolstoï agrees with them. They had the same contempt for wives and mothers, and uttered the same blasphemies against that divine passion that has filled the world with art and song.

All this is to my mind a kind of insanity ; nature soured or withered—deformed so that celibacy is mistaken for virtue. The imagination becomes polluted, and the poor wretch believes that he is purer than his thoughts, holier than his desires, and that to outrage nature is the highest form of religion. But nature imprisoned, obstructed, tormented, always has sought for and has always found revenge. Some of these victims, regarding the passions as low and corrupting, feeling humiliated by hunger and thirst, sought through maimings and mutilations the purification of the soul.

Count Tolstoï, in "The Kreutzer Sonata," has drawn, with a free hand, one of the vilest and basest of men for his hero. He is suspicious, jealous, cruel, infamous. The wife is infinitely too good for such a wild unreasoning beast, and yet the writer of this insane story seems to justify the assassin. If this is a true picture of wedded life in Russia, no wonder that Count Tolstoï looks forward with pleasure to the extinction of the human race.

Of all passions that can take possession of the heart or brain jealousy is the worst. For many generations the chemists sought for the secret by which all metals could be changed to gold, and through which the basest could become the best. Jealousy seeks exactly the opposite. It endeavors to transmute the very gold of love into the dross of shame and crime.

The story of "The Kreutzer Sonata" seems to have been written for the purpose of showing that woman is at fault ; that she has no right to be attractive, no right to be beautiful ; and that she is morally responsible for the contour of her throat, for the pose of her body, for the symmetry of her limbs, for the red of her lips, and for the dimples in her cheeks.

The opposite of this doctrine is nearer true. It would be far better to hold people responsible for their ugliness than for their beauty. It may be true that the soul, the mind, in some wondrous way fashions the body, and that to that extent every individual is responsible for his looks. It may be that the man or woman thinking high thoughts will give, necessarily, a nobility to expression and a beauty to outline.

It is not true that the sins of man can be laid justly at the feet of woman. Women are better than men; they have greater responsibilities; they bear even the burdens of joy. This is the real reason why their faults are considered greater.

Men and women desire each other and this desire is a condition of civilization, progress, and happiness, and of everything of real value. But there is this profound difference in the sexes: in man this desire is the foundation of love, while in woman love is the foundation of this desire.

Tolstoï seems to be a stranger to the heart of woman.

Is it not wonderful that one who holds self-denial in such high esteem should say, "That life is embittered by the fear of one's children, and not only on account of their real or imaginary illnesses, but even by their very presence"?

Has the father no real love for the children? Is he not paid a thousand times through their caresses, their sympathy, their love? Is there no joy in seeing their minds unfold, their affections develop? Of course, love and anxiety go together. That which we love we wish to protect. The perpetual fear of death gives love intensity and sacredness. Yet Count Tolstoï gives us the feelings of a father incapable of natural affection; of one who hates to have his children sick because the orderly course of his wretched life is disturbed. So, too, we are told that modern mothers think too much of their children, care too much for their health, and refuse to be comforted when they die. Lest these words may be thought libellous, the following extract is given:

"In old times women consoled themselves with the belief, The Lord hath given, and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. They consoled themselves with the thought that the soul of the departed had returned to him who gave it; that it was better to die innocent than to live in sin. If women nowadays had such a comfortable faith to support them, they might take their misfortunes less hard."

The conclusion reached by the writer is that without faith in God woman's love grovels in the mire.

In this case the mire is made by the tears of mothers falling on the clay that hides their babes.

The one thing constant, the one peak that rises above all clouds, the one window in which the light forever burns, the one star that darkness cannot quench, is woman's love.

This one fact justifies the existence and the perpetuation of the human race. Again I say that women are better than men ; their hearts are more unreservedly given ; in the web of their lives sorrow is inextricably woven with the greatest joys ; self-sacrifice is a part of their nature, and at the behest of love and maternity they walk willingly and joyously down to the very gates of death.

Is there nothing in this to excite the admiration, the adoration, of a modern reformer ? Are the monk and nun superior to the father and mother ?

The author of "*The Kreutzer Sonata*" is unconsciously the enemy of mankind. He is filled with what might be called a merciless pity, a sympathy almost malicious. Had he lived a few centuries ago, he might have founded a religion ; but the most he can now do is, perhaps, to create the necessity for another asylum.

Count Tolstoï objects to music—not the ordinary kind, but to great music, the music that arouses the emotions, that apparently carries us beyond the limitations of life, that for the moment seems to break the great chain of cause and effect, and leaves the soul soaring and free. "Emotion and duty," he declares, "do not go hand in hand." All art touches and arouses the emotional nature. The painter, the poet, the sculptor, the composer, the orator, appeal to the emotions, to the passions, to the hopes and fears. The commonplace is transfigured ; the cold and angular facts of existence take form and color ; the blood quickens ; the fancies spread their wings ; the intellect grows sympathetic ; the river of life flows full and free ; and man becomes capable of the noblest deeds. Take emotion from the heart of man and the idea of obligation would be lost ; right and wrong would lose their meaning, and the word "ought" would never again be spoken. We are subject to conditions, liable to disease, pain, and death. We are capable of ecstasy. Of these conditions, of these possibilities, the emotions are born.

Only the conditionless can be the emotionless.

We are conditioned beings ; and if the conditions are changed,

the result may be pain or death or greater joy. We can only live within certain degrees of heat. If the weather were a few degrees hotter or a few degrees colder, we could not exist. We need food and roof and raiment. Life and happiness depend on these conditions. We do not certainly know what is to happen, and consequently our hopes and fears are constantly active—that is to say, we are emotional beings. The generalization of Tolstoï, that emotion never goes hand in hand with duty, is almost the opposite of the truth. The idea of duty could not exist without emotion. Think of men and women without love, without desires, without passions? Think of a world without art or music—a world without beauty, without emotion.

And yet there are many writers busy pointing out the loathsomeness of love and their own virtues. Only a little while ago an article appeared in one of the magazines in which all women who did not dress according to the provincial prudery of the writer were denounced as impure. Millions of refined and virtuous wives and mothers were described as dripping with pollution because they enjoyed dancing and were so well formed that they were not obliged to cover their arms and throats to avoid the pity of their associates. And yet the article itself is far more indelicate than any dance or any dress, or even lack of dress. What a curious opinion dried apples have of fruit upon the tree!

Count Tolstoï is also the enemy of wealth, of luxury. In this he follows the New Testament. "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." He gathers his inspiration from the commandment, "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor."

Wealth is not a crime any more than health or bodily or intellectual strength. The weak might denounce the strong, the sickly might envy the healthy, just as the poor may denounce or envy the rich. A man is not necessarily a criminal because he is wealthy. He is to be judged, not by his wealth, but by the way he uses his wealth. The strong man can use his strength, not only for the benefit of himself, but for the good of others. So a man of intelligence can be a benefactor of the human race. Intelligence is often used to entrap the simple and to prey upon the unthinking, but we do not wish to do away with intelligence. So strength is often used to tyrannize over

the weak, and in the same way wealth may be used to the injury of mankind. To sell all that you have and give to the poor is not a panacea for poverty. The man of wealth should help the poor man to help himself. Men cannot receive without giving some consideration, and if they have not labor or property to give, they give their manhood, their self-respect. Besides, if all should obey this injunction, "Sell what thou hast and give to the poor," who would buy? We know that thousands and millions of rich men lack generosity and have but little feeling for their fellows. The fault is not in the money, not in the wealth, but in the individuals. They would be just as bad were they poor. The only difference is that they would have less power. The good man should regard wealth as an instrumentality, as an opportunity, and he should endeavor to benefit his fellow-men, not by making them the recipients of his charity, but by assisting them to assist themselves. The desire to clothe and feed, to educate and protect, wives and children, is the principal reason for making money—one of the great springs of industry, prudence, and economy.

Those who labor have a right to live. They have a right to what they earn. He who works has a right to home and fire-side and to the comforts of life. Those who waste the spring, the summer, and the autumn of their lives must bear the winter when it comes. Many of our institutions are absurdly unjust. Giving the land to the few, making tenants of the many, is the worst possible form of socialism—of paternal government. In most of the nations of our day the idlers and non-producers are either beggars or aristocrats, paupers or princes, and the great middle laboring class support them both. Rags and robes have a liking for each other. Beggars and kings are in accord; they are all parasites, living on the same blood, stealing the same labor—one by beggary, the other by force. And yet in all this there can be found no reason for denouncing the man who has accumulated. One who wishes to tear down his barns and build greater has laid aside something to keep the wolf of want from the door of home when he is dead.

Even the beggars see the necessity of others working, and the nobility see the same necessity with equal clearness. But it is hardly reasonable to say that all should do the same kind of work, for the reason that all have not the same aptitudes, the

same talents. Some can plough, others can paint; some can reap and mow, while others can invent the instruments that save labor; some navigate the seas; some work in mines; while others compose music that elevates and refines the heart of the world.

But the worst thing in "The Kreutzer Sonata" is the declaration that a husband can by force compel the wife to love and obey him. Love is not the child of fear; it is not the result of force. No one can love on compulsion. Even Jehovah found that it was impossible to compel the Jews to love him. He issued his command to that effect, coupled with threats of pain and death, but his chosen people failed to respond.

Love is the perfume of the heart; it is not subject to the will of husbands, or kings, or God.

Count Tolstoï would establish slavery in every house; he would make every husband a tyrant and every wife a trembling serf. No wonder that he regards such marriage as a failure. He is in exact harmony with the curse of Jehovah when he said unto the woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be unto thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

This is the destruction of the family, the pollution of home, the crucifixion of love.

Those who are truly married are neither masters nor servants. The idea of obedience is lost in the desire for the happiness of each. Love is not a convict, to be detained with bolts and chains. Love is the highest expression of liberty. Love neither commands nor obeys.

The curious thing is that the orthodox world insists that all men and women should obey the injunctions of Christ; that they should take him as the supreme example, and in all things follow his teachings. This is preached from countless pulpits, and has been for many centuries. And yet the man who does follow the Saviour, who insists that he will not resist evil, who sells what he has and gives to the poor, who deserts his wife and children for the love of God, is regarded as insane.

Tolstoï, on most subjects, appears to be in accord with the founder of Christianity, with the Apostles, with the writers of the New Testament, and with the Fathers of the church; and yet a Christian teacher of a Sabbath-school decides, in the capacity of Postmaster-General, that "The Kreutzer Sonata" is unfit to be carried in the mails.

Although I disagree with nearly every sentence in this book, regard the story as brutal and absurd, the view of life presented as cruel, vile, and false, yet I recognize the right of Count Tolstoi to express his opinions on all subjects, and the right of the men and women of America to read for themselves.

As to the sincerity of the author, there is not the slightest doubt. He is willing to give all that he has for the good of his fellow-men. He is a soldier in what he believes to be a sacred cause, and he has the courage of his convictions. He is endeavoring to organize society in accordance with the most radical utterances that have been attributed to Jesus Christ. The philosophy of Palestine is not adapted to an industrial and commercial age. Christianity was born when the nation that produced it was dying. It was a requiem—a declaration that life was a failure, that the world was about to end, and that the hopes of mankind should be lifted to another sphere. Tolstoi stands with his back to the sunrise and looks mournfully upon the shadow. He has uttered many tender, noble, and inspiring words. There are many passages in his works that must have been written when his eyes were filled with tears. He has fixed his gaze so intently on the miseries and agonies of life that he has been driven to the conclusion that nothing could be better than the effacement of the human race.

Some men, looking only at the faults and tyrannies of government, have said: "Anarchy is better." Others, looking at the misfortunes, the poverty, the crimes, of men, have, in a kind of pitying despair, reached the conclusion that the best of all is death. These are the opinions of those who have dwelt in gloom—of the self-imprisoned.

By comparing long periods of time, we see that, on the whole, the race is advancing; that the world is growing steadily, and surely, better; that each generation enjoys more and suffers less than its predecessor. We find that our institutions have the faults of individuals. Nations must be composed of men and women; and as they have their faults, nations cannot be perfect. The institution of marriage is a failure to the extent, and only to the extent, that the human race is a failure. Undoubtedly it is the best and the most important institution that has been established by the civilized world. If there is unhappiness in

that relation, if there is tyranny upon one side and misery upon the other, it is not the fault of marriage. Take homes from the world and only wild beasts are left.

We cannot cure the evils of our day and time by a return to savagery. It is not necessary to become ignorant to increase our happiness. The highway of civilization leads to the light. The time will come when the human race will be truly enlightened, when labor will receive its due reward, when the last institution begotten of ignorance and savagery will disappear. The time will come when the whole world will say that the love of man for woman, of woman for man, of mother for child, is the highest, the noblest, the purest, of which the heart is capable.

Love, human love, love of men and women, love of mothers, fathers, and babes, is the perpetual and beneficent force. Not the love of phantoms, the love that builds cathedrals and dungeons, that trembles and prays, that kneels and curses; but the real love, the love that felled the forests, navigated the seas, subdued the earth, explored continents, built countless homes, and founded nations—the love that kindled the creative flame and wrought the miracles of art, that gave us all there is of music, from the cradle-song that gives to infancy its smiling sleep to the great symphony that bears the soul away with wings of fire—the real love, mother of every virtue and of every joy.

ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.